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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3923

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SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN; PRM

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREF PHUM PGOV TX

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: PRM TAFT GRANT-FUNDED VOCATIONAL TRAINING WORKSHOPS COMPLETED

REF: A. ASHGABAT 787

1B. ASHGABAT 1247

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for Internet distribution.

¶2. (SBU) On December 11, poloff and political assistant attended the opening of three vocational training workshops funded by a Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration Julia Taft Refugee Fund grant, the first such grant project to be implemented in Turkmenistan. The workshops, for sewing, carpet making and metal working, are located in three renovated rooms of the local school in the Gokhan settlement in Mary province, about an hour's drive from the provincial capital, Mary city. Gokhan settlement is a residential area located on a farmer's union (formerly a Soviet kolkhoz or collective farm) of the same name. The refugees and former refugees who live in Gokhan are ethnic Turkmen who came from Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran. Those who came from Tajikistan were granted Turkmen citizenship in 2005. The refugees and former refugees make up about 70 percent of the settlement's population. They were settled on the former kolkhoz because there was vacant housing available in small, Soviet-era apartment buildings. Some have also built modest single-family houses. Training and employment opportunities, especially for young people, are scarce.

¶3. (SBU) Poloff and political assistant were accompanied throughout the visit by Murad Atayev, the head of the Mary provincial branch of the Humanitarian Association of Turkmen of the World (Ref B) and the provincial official responsible for international cooperation projects. Also present was Sabir Agabalyayev, programs manager for the NGO Keik Okara, which was the Embassy's partner in conducting a needs assessment and implementing the project. In addition, the school director, representatives of the farmers' union, district and provincial governments and numerous local residents were present for the opening of the workshops.

¶4. (SBU) The sewing workshop was located in a well-lighted room that had been recently painted and provided with new electrical wiring. Security bars had been installed on the windows. The sewing machines were being used by teenage

girls who were sewing school uniforms for younger siblings. It was the first time they had used electric sewing machines.

The school has designated an instructor/supervisor for the sewing workshop. Sewing classes for students will be held during school hours, with an opportunity for residents to use the equipment for income generating work at other times. The carpet workshop consisted of two vertical steel carpet looms for use in hand-weaving carpets. The women in the workshop said they use horizontal carpet looms on the floors of their homes, but that they would teach their daughters to use the vertical looms because it would be much more comfortable. They displayed samples of their carpets, which they sell in the bazaar in Mary city. The carpet workshop would be overseen by a former refugee from Iran, a dynamic woman who had received awards for her weaving and was vocal in her support for the workshop as useful for the community. In the metalwork shop, the massive lathe machine was not yet hooked up to a power source. They had the cable to make the necessary direct connection to the power substation across the street, but there had not been enough time before the opening to install it. The farmer's union is committed to hiring a full-time supervisor for the workshop. Officials noted that the area will benefit greatly from the ability to fabricate parts and make repairs provided by the workshop.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: The visit, scheduled well in advance, provided an useful impetus for local officials to complete the premises and get the workshops up and running. Given the isolation of the settlement and the limited opportunities for both training and income generating activities, the workshops clearly meet local needs and have already been embraced by

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the population. The school setting is accessible to the community at large and also will provide a level of security for the proper maintenance and use of the equipment. In addition to helping the residents of Gokhan, the project was useful in developing working relations between the local NGO and government officials. A return visit in a few months will provide confirmation about the ongoing operation of the workshops. Post distributed a press release about the event and posted a news item and pictures on its website. END COMMENT.

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